MARVEL

LAST HERO STANDING™

LAST HERO STANDING

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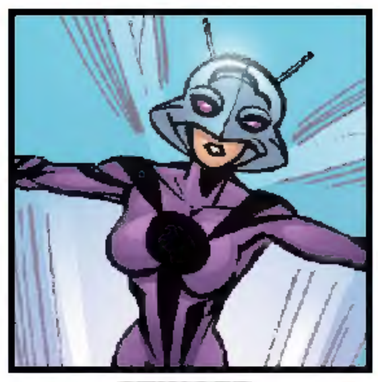
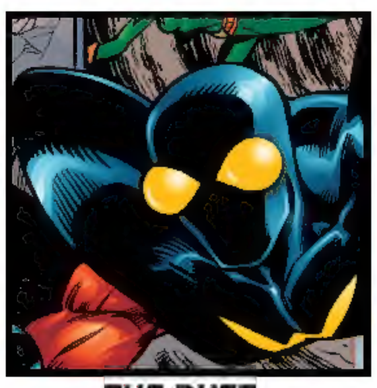
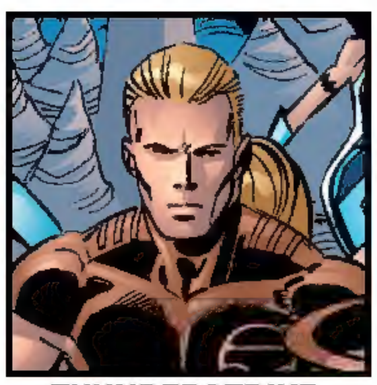
LAST HERO STANDING



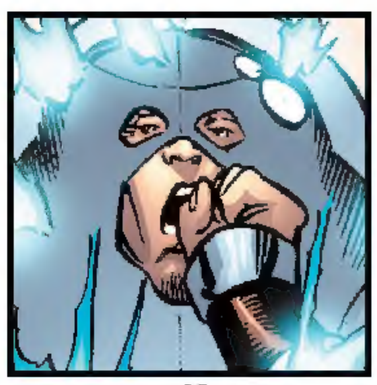
STINGER
Cassie Lang
Flight, Shrinking Powers, Bio- Electric Blasts



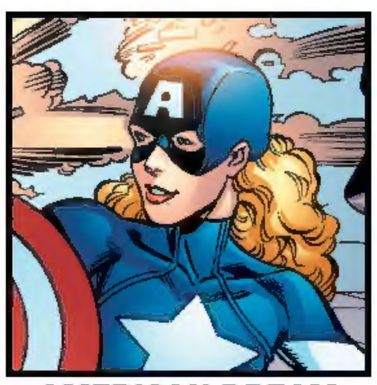
THE BUZZ
J.J. Jameson
Flight, Enhanced Strength, Taser Blasts



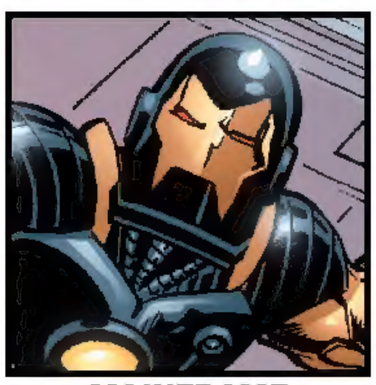
THUNDERSTRIKE
Kevin Masterson
Thunderblasts, Super-Strength



J2
Zane Marko
Invulnerable, Super-Strength



AMERICAN DREAM
Shannon Carter
Super-Athlete



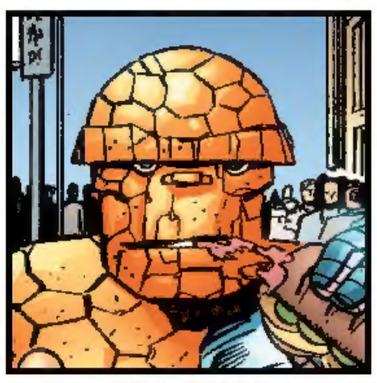
MAINFRAME
Armored War Machine

BLUESTREAK
Super-Speed

FREEBOOTER
Brandon Cross
Weapons & Martial Arts Expert

HUMAN TORCH
Johnny Storm
Flight, Flame-Powers

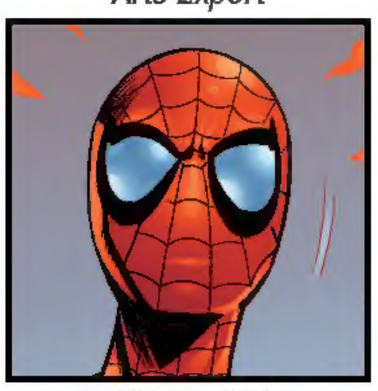
MS. FANTASTIC
Lyja Storm
Shape-Shifting Skrull



THE THING
Ben Grimm
Super-Strength

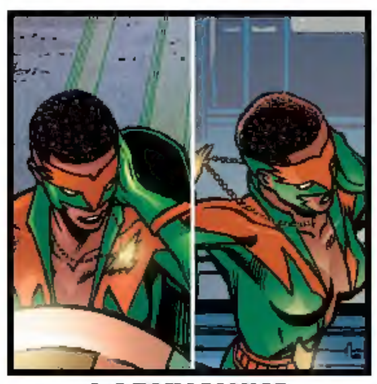
PSI-LORD
Franklin Richards
Telepathy, Telekinesis

BIG BRAIN
Reed Richards
Team Thinker



SPIDER-GIRL
May "Mayday" Parker
Spiderlike Strength & Agility

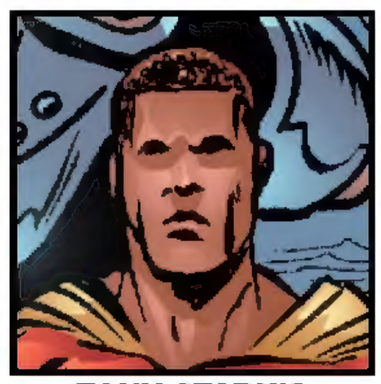
WILD THING
Rina Logan
Psi-claws, Animal-like Senses



LADYHAWKS
Martial Arts Experts

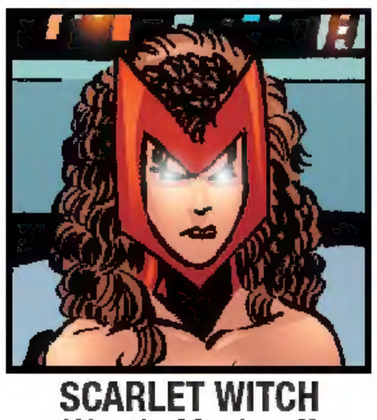
GREEN GOBLIN
Phil Urich
Goblin-like Weaponry

TONY STARK
Entrepreneur
formerly Iron Man



TONY STARK'S BODYGUARD
Super-Strength, Flight

CAPTAIN AMERICA
Steve Rogers
Super-Soldier



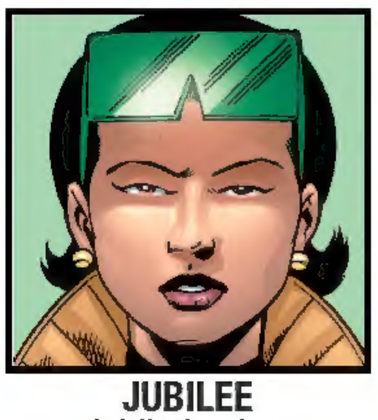
SCARLET WITCH
Wanda Maximoff
Hex Magic

SPIDER-MAN
Peter Parker
Spiderlike Strength & Agility

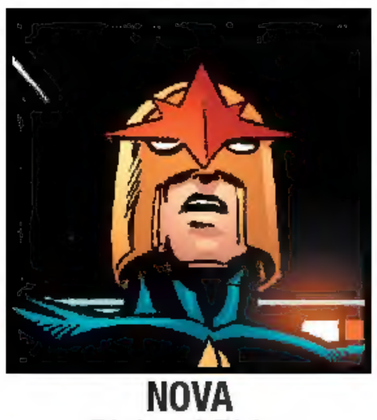
WOLVERINE
Logan
Accelerated Healing, Adamantium Skeleton/Claws

DOCTOR STRANGE
Stephen Strange
Former Sorcerer Supreme

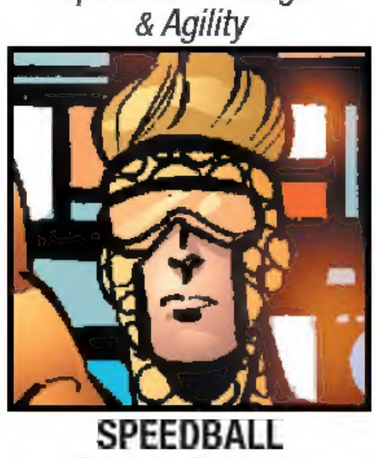
DOC MAGUS
Sorcerer Supreme



JUBILEE
Jubilation Lee
Explosive Energy Bursts



NOVA
Richard Rider
Human Rocket



SPEEDBALL
Robbie Baldwin
Kinetic Powers

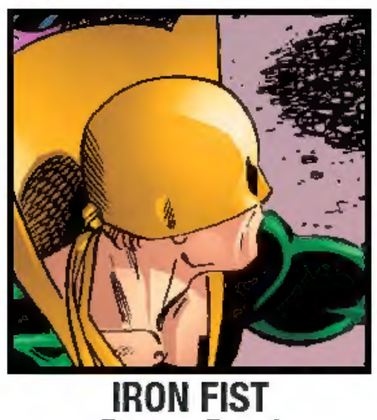
EARTH SENTRY
John Foster
Super-Strength, Flight

ARGO
Super-Strength

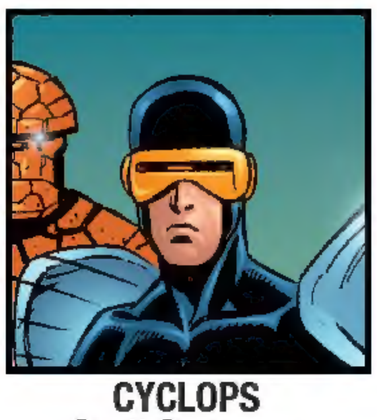
HAWKEYE
Clint Barton
Marksman, former Avenger

VISION
Density Manipulation

DARKDEVIL
Riley Tyne
Denomic Powers



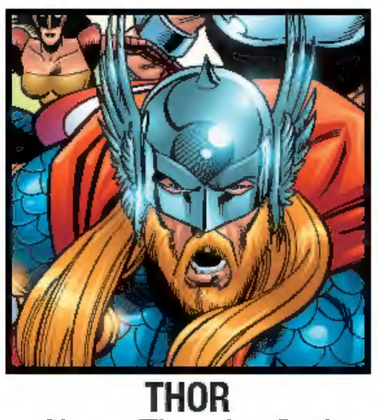
IRON FIST
Danny Rand
Martial Arts, Iron Fist



CYCLOPS
Scott Summers
Optic Blasts

HULK
Bruce Banner
Super-Strength

VIZIER
Advisor to the Lord of Asgard



THOR
Norse Thunder God

It began two nights ago:

The world knows him as **Wolverine**, and he is the very best at what he does.

Right now he is bonding with his daughter by tracking her through the **New Jersey Pine Barrens**--

--and reveling in the thrill of the hunt.

Suddenly, his animal-like senses detect a vaguely familiar and menacing scent...

RRRRP-SSHLUMPPP

Rina--!

Dad--?!?

Rina Logan has always been daddy's girl--

--although she calls herself **Wild Thing** whenever she's in costume.

You **okay**, Dad--?

D-Daddy-?!?

It continued yesterday afternoon:

The world knows her as **Ladyhawk**, a costumed identity she shares with her twin sister.

You can call 911 now, sis.

The hijackers are ready for pickup.

That didn't take long.

You feel like meeting at the warehouse for lunch?

I'm in the mood for Chinese.

Sounds like a plan. I could go for some fried dumplings, a combo #5 and a--HOLY--!

RRRRR-SSHLUMPPP

What's with the weird sound, sis?

C'mon! Don't leave me hanging!

What's going on there?

Sis--?!?

I am the *Watcher.*

For millennia beyond number, I have observed the birth of worlds, the rise of civilizations and the deaths of galaxies.

I see all that *is* and all that *will be.*

I can also peer into alternate planes of reality to glimpse all that *might have been* or *could possibly be.*

From my home on Earth's solitary moon, I have witnessed humanity's slow ascent from *dwellers of caves* to *explorers of stars.*

Mankind has always had a special fascination with ***heroes***-- those courageous individuals who willingly put themselves at risk defending *ideals* and *innocents.*

With great sorrow, I can see that this planet is even now racing toward a most *critical juncture*--

--a *pivotal moment* that may soon signal an end to the modern ***age of heroes***--

--and usher in a new ***era of darkness.***

Earth's modern *age of heroes* began when cosmic rays transformed four courageous individuals into the *Fantastic Four*--

--*Mr. Fantastic*, the *Human Torch*, the *Invisible Woman* and the *Thing!*

Other super-powered individuals soon appeared--

--and a capricious *god* accidentally caused many of Earth's mightiest heroes to unite in common cause--

--and form the *Avengers.*

In one possible future, the years have passed and the *Fantastic Four* have become the *Fantastic Five.*

The Invisible Woman has left the team, and Mr. Fantastic has transferred his intelligence into the android called *Big Brain.*

Their son, the telepathic and telekinetic *Psi-Lord*, and the Torch's shape-changing wife, *Ms. Fantastic*, now complete the group.

A new generation has also risen to reform the mighty *Avengers*--

--and there are also many other responsible *individuals* who employ their unique *gifts* to safeguard humanity.

All of these heroes have sacrificed *much* to protect the planet of their birth.

They will soon be called upon to sacrifice even *more.*

A great *enemy* has returned--

--and will soon inflict even greater *pain* and *misery* on this poor, unsuspecting world.

The battle that is to come has already claimed *Wolverine* and *Ladyhawk.*

They are only the *first...*

AVENGERS COMPOUND...

Eyes front, people!

Our goal is to reach the far side of this chamber without getting tagged by these robot zappers.

Lead the way, sir!

It's an honor to follow the legendary *Captain America.*

÷Sheesh÷

Could you lay the grease on any thicker, *American Dream?*

Pay attention to the ***exercise,*** *Bluestreak--*

--and keep a civil tongue in your head.

We can all learn a lot from someone with Cap's experience.

Speak for yourself, *Mainframe.*

While you were mouthing off, I completed the course a dozen times--

--and even stopped for a sandwich.

Ain't my fault ol' winghead can't keep up with the modern generation.

This is supposed to be a *team,* speedy.

You could lend a hand to *Freebooter* or *American Dream.*

Forget it, *Stinger!*

We can hold our own.

Yeah, but we Avengers need to work *together.*

The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

*Oh, great! **Thunderstrike*** is shifting into speech-mode.

I'd rather take a *head zap* than listen to his cornball clichés.

At least that's an option for you.

Yawn

Me, I'm just bored out of my ever-lovin' mind.

You're missing the entire point of the exercise, J2.

I know that you're practically invulnerable, but you're supposed to avoid getting--

KA-ZAKK!

ARRRK

Emergency override.

Initiating immediate shutdown.

You all right, Cap?

Are you injured?

For a seemingly eternal moment, he stares at these young Avengers.

Then, ever so slowly, he rises.

I...I'm *fine.*

But it might be better if you continued this training session on your own.

Steve Rogers was a poor physical specimen until an experimental Super-Soldier formula transformed him into **Captain America**, the living legend of **World War II.**

A twist of fate transported him into the modern age of heroes, where he eventually joined the original **Avengers.**

Unfortunately, even legends grow old.

Their scars accumulate.

Their reflexes lose speed.

And their strength begins to fail.

If this had been a real mission, he might have endangered the entire team.

Perhaps the time has finally come for him to...

WEEEEEEEE

He reacts instinctively to the sudden alarm.

All doubts and hesitation are immediately forgotten as he answers the call to action.

He will somehow find a way to do his duty.

For he is still **Captain America**--

--and can do no less.

Anthony "Tony" Stark is the CEO of Stark Global Enterprises.

He is a multi-billionaire who is often seen in the company of powerful world leaders and beautiful supermodels.

He is also the former golden Avenger known as Iron Man, but that seems like a lifetime ago.

He retired shortly after the mission that almost cost Wanda "the Scarlet Witch" Maximoff her life.

He visits her hospital room as often as he can.

With a sardonic smile, he acknowledges that his most enduring relationship has been with a comatose woman--

--and wonders what that says about his character.

RRRR-SSHLUMPP

Wanda--?!?

WANDA--!

Her name is May "Mayday" Parker and she is the daughter of Spider-Man.

Many are the menaces and challenges she has faced since donning her webs as Spider-Girl, but few have filled her with such horror...

...as this.

EEEEUUU!

Benjy, how could you?!

Thanks for helping out, May.

Yeah, right!

Funny how you failed to mention the toxic diaper when you suggested I play with my little brother.

Here! A cup of my special vanilla hazelnut blend should make amends.

Do I also smell a touch of cinnamon?

You do.

Okay, all's forgiven.

You hear anything about heroes going missing while you were out web-swinging last night?

Yeah, I got a call from *Uncle Phil.*

He thinks one of the *Ladyhawks* may have vanished.

I'll check in with him later and score the details.

If you like, I could follow up when I see him at the office later.

Sounds like a plan.

If someone is snatching heroes, I want you to be especially careful out there.

Uhhhh...you do realize that my ***spider-sense*** warns me of danger and no one can sneak up on me.

Famous last words.

What's going on, guys?

Dad weaseled out on diaper duty again.

Peter!

Hey, you know how many times I saved this city from destruction?

I'm entitled to a little slack.

Yeah.

Sure.

Just remember to pick up ***Pampers*** on your lunch hour.

You tell him, Mom.

I'll see you later. I'm due at school.

As she strolls toward **Midtown High,** *Mayday Parker smiles to herself.*

Even if some unknown entity is really trying to kidnap costumed heroes, there are much easier targets than **Spider-Girl.**

Benjamin J. Grimm is one of the world's greatest adventurers.

--and battled cosmically powered foes.

AKKRRRRRRRRR

As a founding member of the Fantastic Four, he has traveled to distant galaxies--

--explored alternate dimensions--

Hey--!

At that very moment in Fantastic Five Headquarters...

Look--the Fantastiflare!

The Thing's in trouble!

Franklin, you need to hold the transcendentalizer steady until I can finish welding the new shielding.

I hear you, Uncle Johnny.

I've bolted the last of the rivets into place and--

AVENGERS ASSEMBLE!

The Scarlet Witch has been abducted.

Someone or something burrowed beneath her hospital room and left only a gaping hole behind.

The M.O. seems to match the other reports we've heard.

Wonderful! We have a serial kidnapper.

I've already dispatched my personal body-guard to the crime scene.

We'll join him as soon as we can, and Tony...

...don't worry! We'll find Wanda.

I know, Cap.

It's good to see you, old friend.

I can understand someone going after *Wolverine* or the *Thing*.

But *Ladyhawk* is strictly minor league--

--and the *Witch* hasn't been active for years.

There must be a method to the madness.

We need to find the kidnapper's pattern so that we can discern--

"--his next target!"

You're sure one of the Ladyhawks was taken?

No question about it, Pete.

Her sister was pretty frantic.

How'd she reach you, Phil? Don't tell me she knows your secret identity?

No, but she has my cell number.

The new *Green Goblin* has a cell phone?!

Super-heroing has changed since your day, Pete.

Anyway, I called the *Buzz*--

You work with that costumed lunatic?!

People used to say the same thing about you, remember?

Bottom line--we couldn't find any trace of her.

Do you think--*oh, no!*

Phil, *go!* Get out of here--*NOW!*

W-What's *wrong?*

I suddenly sense--

RRRR

RRRRRRRRRRR

--danger.

Holy--!

Bitten by a radioactive spider, **Peter Parker** gained the proportionate strength, speed and agility of the arachnid--

--and became the always-amazing **Spider-Man.**

But that was before he lost his right leg in a near-fatal confrontation with one of his greatest enemies.

Ha! Your warrior days are long over, cripple.

Your fate has been written and you cannot escape it.

Wanna ***bet?***

I may no longer be in peak physical condition--

Terrific! I landed wrong and my artificial leg is buckling.

KERWA

--but I'm still miles away from HELPLESS!

Who are you?

How did you learn about me?

What do you want?

I only desire an immediate *end* to this madness--

--ere my troops drench the streets with the *blood of innocents.*

ZEEEEEE

MIDTOWN HIGH SCHOOL

Hey, Uncle Phil.

Have you seen my dad? He was going to--

Something terrible has happened, May.

A gang of armored thugs snatched him right in front of me.

It all happened so fast. There wasn't anything I could do.

You have to meet me at the intersection of Queens Boulevard and--

I'm already on my way, Uncle Phil.

I just need time to *change*.

*By the time Mayday arrives, **Phil Urich** has become the **Green Goblin** and summoned additional help...*

It's just like my sister's pit.

Duh!

But they grabbed some random old guy this time.

Maybe he wasn't so *random.*

Whatever! We might as well start looking--

--for all the good it'll do!

Your positive attitude inspires real confidence, *Buzz.*

Stuff it, Spider-Girl! You weren't with us yesterday.

We spent hours searching for my sister and couldn't find a single clue.

At least we know who's behind the abductions.

Do we? Those armored men could be working for anyone.

For the next several hours, the team moves deeper and deeper underground, until...

Listen! I hear people up ahead.

It's probably the kidnappers.

I...I'm not so sure about that...

Looks like we have company!

Spider-Girl! What are you and your friends doing down here?

Probably the same thing as you guys.

Who'd you lose?

You remember Tony Stark's bodyguard?

The Scarlet Witch. She was taken from a downtown hospital.

Never gave it.

Yeah, but I never caught your name.

Friendly as ever.

Anyways, we began in Forest Hills and the Goblin can describe the actual-- oh, look!

Don't let us interrupt!

We're trying to track down the *Thing*.

Anybody have any idea where we are?

Our starting point was West 97th Street and Columbus.

Ladyhawk was taken from Brooklyn.

And the *X-People* told us that *Wolverine* was in the New Jersey Pine Barrens.

5

Is it possible that all these tunnels are connected?

They must extend for hundreds of miles.

Who could have constructed such a maze?

And WHY?!

Another successful hunt, m'lord.

You may place him with the others.

He appears so weak and fragile...

But he, too, shall serve my glorious purpose.

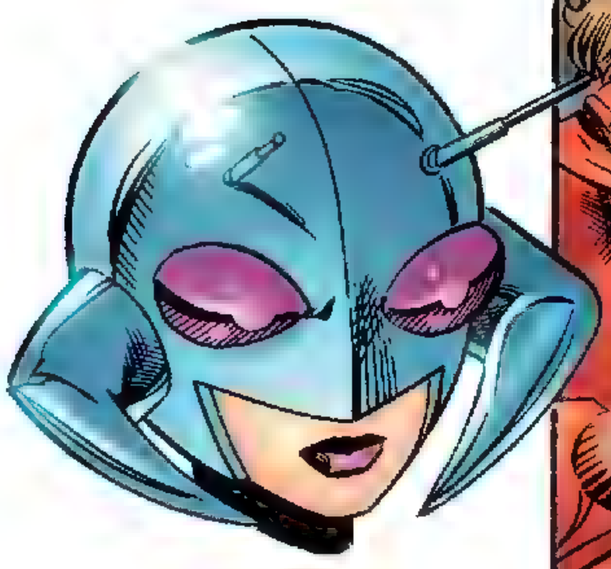
REVENGE for an unforgivable sin that has forever haunted me!

TO BE CONTINUED!

'RING!
KESEL '05

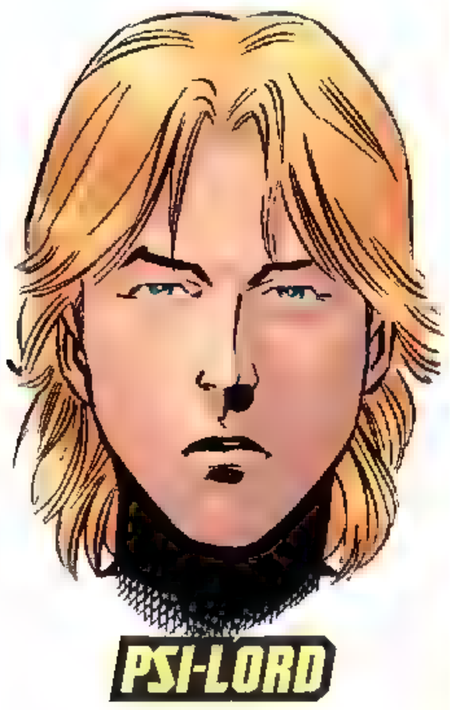
In the back room of an unassuming Manhattan comic book store, a brooding figure communes with forces far beyond the ken of mortal men. He is ***Doc Magus***, the present Sorcerer Supreme of this plane of reality, and his concentration is unexpectedly disrupted by a most extraordinary visitor...

SPIDER-GIRL



STINGER

HUMAN TORCH



PSI-LORD

Attend me, Dormagus!

I have already enlisted the aid of the ***Hulk*** and the ***Sub-Mariner*** in the current crisis, and now call upon you.

Give me a break, *Dr. Strange.*

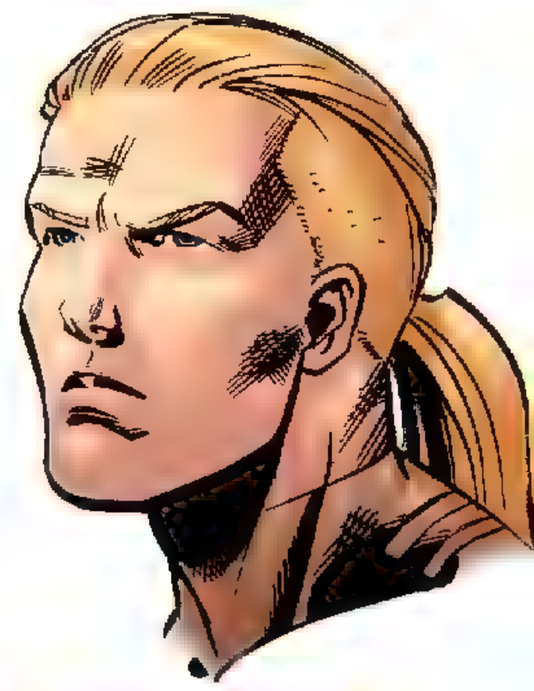
There's no way I'm joining your dopey *Defenders.*

I can find the missing heroes on my own.

CAPTAIN AMERICA

J2

WILD THING



THUNDERSTRIKE

You certainly have the arrogance of youth, my son.

I pray you will live long enough to attain the wisdom that comes with maturity.

Blah Blah Blah!

Back to the retirement community, old man!

I ain't Strange's biggest fan, but you shouldn't have blown him off.

Something big is going down, and you might need the backup.

DAILY BUGLE
FINAL
NEW YORK'S FINEST DAILY NEWSPAPER
Tuesday, October 6, 2026
HEROES DISAPPEAR!
Who's Responsible
Editorial by J.Jonah Jameson
Sports: Yanks

Don't start on me, Deacon. I don't need anyone's help.

I can solve this case on my own.

Okay, kid. I know when I'm wasting my breath.

Just don't do anything stupid before lunch.

I'd like at least one indigestion-free day.

Whatever! I'm going to slip into my *astral form* and investigate the latest *crime scene.*

This must be the place.

According to eyewitnesses, a bunch of armored creeps popped out of the ground and snatched someone dressed as a civilian.

The victim appeared to exhibit superhuman agility, but no one got a good look at his face.

Drifting downward, Doc Magus slips through the ground like a ghost and immediately begins to follow the maze of tunnels that unravel before him...

Score one for the good guys!

I can sense a mystical presence at work here.

With a little luck and a lot of skill, I can force it to reveal itself.

As the young magician utters a spell that was old when the Earth was still young, the golden amulet around his neck slowly begins to open--

--revealing a glowing and unblinking eye.

The orb grows ever brighter as Doc Magus calls upon ancient mystical forces to aid him...

By the power of the deathless Vishanti and the hosts of Hoggoth, I summon the evil presence--

--and command you to SHOW yourself at once!

Foolish, foolish mortal!

I could have easily refused your ungracious invitation--

--and have only come because it is my will to humble you.

Yeah, yeah, I've heard *that* song before.

You're destined to go *down*, pal-- *and we both know it!*

Do we, mortal?

I find your bravado as *unimpressive* and *rudimentary* as your power.

Behold how easily I shatter your *binding spell!*

Do not underestimate me, mortal! I am no mere magician.

The power I wield is one of the fundamental forces of the universe itself--

--and NONE can stand against it!

Though I could easily snuff you out like an unwanted candle, I prefer to reunite you with your mortal form--

--so that you can eventually serve my greater purpose.

BRRRP-SSHLUMPP

THE AMAZING SPINED-MAN

THE INCREDIBLE HULK

AVENGERS

EXILES

What the--?!

Hey, kid!

You all right in--

Oh, great!

Time to break out the *Tums!*

So *this* is where you've been hiding!

I've been looking all over ***Avengers Mansion*** for you, Cap.

Stinger is assembling the team to discuss the missing heroes.

I'll be right with you, ***Thunder-strike.***

It's getting to be a real battle to maintain my *strength*--

--and to keep my reflexes *honed* and *ready*.

I don't have super-powers like the rest of you and need to stay in shape.

When you get to be my age, a daily workout is a must.

It's only a matter of time before my physical skills erode to the point where I'll be forced to--

WHOA!

You *okay?* Seems like you hit the ground a little fast.

Exactly my point, Thunderstrike.

I should have nailed that landing.

C'mon, Cap... you're much too hard on yourself.

Sure, you may be getting old--

--but you're a long way from hanging up your shield.

The *Avengers* still need you.

We have faith in you--

--and wouldn't hesitate to follow you *anywhere.*

Since the attackers strike from under the ground, we've come up with some likely suspects...

Kala, queen of the underworld.

Tyrannus, master of the Subterraneans.

Terrax, the tamer.

The living Lava Man.

Mole Man, ruler of Monster Isle.

The *Fantastic Five* are going to check out their old enemy, *Mole Man*--

--and *Doctor Strange* and his crew will look up *Tyrannus.*

Do you and the *X-People* have any other candidates, Jubilee?

None that we'd like to share, Stinger.

I'm afraid that we mutants have decided to pursue our own investigation without outside assistance.

The attacks seem focused on us.

***Wolverine** was one of the first victims and it now appears that **Cyclops** is also missing.*

Just like the *X-People,* J2--they always think it's *all* about them!

That's why I came to you *Avengers* when my dad vanished.

And we're glad to have you, *Wild Thing.*

Mainframe, why don't you take Stark's bodyguard and Earth Sentry and see what you can find out about Lava Man?

We can also try to locate Kala while we're at it.

Speedball and I often fought Terrax when we were with the original New Warriors.

Since he possesses the Power Cosmic, we're probably the most qualified to go after him.

Nova, if it's all the same to you, Bluestreak and I would like to tag along.

Sorry, we won't have time to baby-sit you--whoever you are!

Name's Argo, and I'm the son of Hercules... so you can just stuff the attitude, mister.

Maybe we should keep a team on standby to investigate any new disappearances.

Good idea, Thunderstrike.

Look, could you do me a favor and go get American Dream and Free-booter?

They're visiting their former mentor Hawkeye at his dojo.

Mind if I tag along? I haven't seen Hawkeye in a dog's age.

The more the merrier.

In that case, J2 and I are also coming.

Ned's Gas'n Gulp

BARTON'S DOJO

OPEN
6AM - 8PM
MON - FRI
7AM - 4PM
SAT - SUN

I appreciate you guys stopping by to check up on me, but I'm not in any danger.

Whoever's behind the kidnappings isn't going to waste his time going after a blind and broken-down former archer.

You're still pretty spry, sir... and you were a great ***Avenger*** in your day.

Yeah, I was pretty good...but even Avengers grow old...and the sun set on my prime a *longggggg* time ago.

Let us know if you need anything, Hawkeye. We're only a phone call away.

But then, even before the two teenagers can reach the dojo's exit...

RRRRRRRRR

The ground-- it's suddenly heaving beneath our feet!

Get out of here, Clint-- *GO!*

American Dream and I will--

SSSHLUMPPP

BARTON'S DOJO

OPEN
6AM - 8PM
MON - FRI
7AM - 4PM
SAT - SUN

Things may seem pretty bad--

--but I'm sure Dad's *okay,* Mom.

So am I, May.

I can't tell you how many times he's gone missing or been reported dead over the years.

Your dad is *Spider-Man.* He'll find a way to get back to us.

He always *has.*

You're the one I'm worried about.

I don't want you taking any unnecessary risks--

--and neither would your father.

I...I love you, Mom...but I...I won't make promises that I may not be able to keep.

I have to do whatever's *required* to stop the kidnappings.

Dad isn't the *only* victim.

ZEEEEEEE

We're calling in all reserve Avengers, *Spider-Girl.*

The situation just keeps getting worse.

According to *Thunderstrike*--

--American Dream and Freebooter are now MIA.

Wha--what can I do to help?

Mom, I...

I gotta go.

I... understand.

Be *safe!*

These caves lead directly to the Mole Man's underground kingdom.

Do you really think he's behind the kidnappings, *Big Brain?*

Anything is *possible, Ms. Fantastic*...but it hardly seems *probable.*

He hasn't been active for many years.

I...I don't sense any *thoughts* in the immediate vicinity.

Keep scanning, *Psi-Lord.*

The place should be teeming with Subterraneans and--*LOOK!*

Up ahead! It appears to be some kind of--

--*Memorial?!*

If the ***Mole Man*** is really *dead,* Torch--

--who's stealing our friends?

Mind if I join the party?

BARTON'S DOJO

This is no time for jokes, young lady.

We may have lost three more comrades.

What are you doing here, *Spider-Girl*?

Stinger sent me.

Fine. I guess we should catch up to *Wild Thing* and *J2*...

...they're already down in the tunnels, trying to track the latest victims.

Captain America... *sir*...I...

I'm *sorry* if I offended you.

I'm the one who should apologize.

You didn't say anything wrong.

I'm just a little touchy today.

Will you *please* slow down?

I can't run as fast as you.

Trust me, I'm not deliberately trying to ditch you.

I'm using my enhanced senses to track the kidnappers--

--just like when my father was taken!

His trail suddenly *died* in the middle of a tunnel and I'm afraid--

--it happened, again!

You're sure the spoor ends here?

You want me to take a lie detector test?

It's like they reached this point and were suddenly zapped into another dimension.

I even combed the wall for a hidden passage, but it's solid rock.

Stand aside, everyone--*while I check out a hunch.*

We could be dealing with a force powerful enough to use living rock to mask its tracks and--

THAKA-BOOM!

Oh, great!

It's some sort of *dimensional gateway.*

I hate it when I'm right.

This could be our big break. We need to alert the other Avengers and prepare a strategy.

I'm afraid I can't get a signal on my cell phone.

Our communicators aren't working either. We're too far underground.

I'll stand guard while you return to the surface to contact Stinger.

Hey, guys! I have a better idea...

While you're wasting time, I'm gonna rescue my dad.

Wild Thing, NO!

Is that girl *crazy?*

We've got no idea what's on the other side. She could have just leaped into a raging sun.

How do we get her back?

We'll have to send someone *after* her--!

J2, this is no time to make like a *lemming.*

We all know I'm the logical choice.

I'm the son of the unstoppable ***Juggernaut,*** and I'm practically indestructible.

It's that *"practically"* qualification that worries me.

Thunderstrike, I hope you and Captain America have a plan.

We *do*...but you probably won't like it.

You make your way to the surface while we go after our fellow ***Avengers.***

B-but--!

Y-You're all *nuts.*

Totally *insane.*

A bunch of macho *jerks.*

Just like *me!*

CLANGGGG!

Oops!

I'm suddenly wishing I had a *return ticket.*

You shouldn't be here, young lady. I gave you a direct order.

No disrespect intended, sir, but--

--you can KISS my web-covered butt!

Orders are for waiters-- *not* friendly neighborhood wall-crawlers!

Speaking of neighborhoods, anyone recognize this area?

Based on the battle armor and landscape, I'm thinking *Asgard.*

THWIPPP!

You mean the home of the legendary *Norse Gods?*

COOOOOLL!

Whatever!

If these guys took Wolverine--

--they'll soon WISH they were only myths.

Am I the only one grounded in reality?

Asgard isn't *real.*

You are *sooooo* wrong.

I'll take you on a little tour and show you the sights--

THAKA-BOOM!

--if we ever manage to *survive* this battle!

Gather to me, my warrior horde!

Send forth the call to all our Troll brothers--

--so that we may *crush* these mortal intruders!

T-thousands upon thousands of them are suddenly springing from the ground.

The odds may be against us, but I fought worse in my day.

We'll find a way to beat them if we all stand together.

AVENGERS ASSEMBLE!

Not far away, in an underground staging area where many more Trolls are donning their battle armor...

Master! Master!

I bring tidings most dire.

What has gone awry?

Has my noble brother finally tumbled to my treachery?

Of that, I cannot speak with any certainty.

I only know that mortals have breached one of your portals.

Those poor misguided fools are obviously here to rescue their missing brethren.

'Tis a mission that is destined to end in *failure* and *tragedy*.

So speaks LOKI--

--who still delights in proclaiming himself the god of MISCHIEF!

Many years have passed since I first committed a most grievous error that has e'er plagued me.

My own subtle machinations accidentally caused the formation of the accursed ***Avengers.***

O, how I have suffered for my dismal folly!

The passage of time may be meaningless to an immortal, but it has allowed me to conceive the ultimate ***revenge.***

Let the humans come! Their comrades are already lost to my subtle sorceries and will not welcome them.

Not only will I finally destroy the hated ***Avengers,*** the entire mortal realm will bear witness to the end of a most unfortunate ***age---***

---The AGE of HEROES!

Her name is *Mary Jane Parker.* She is the wife of *Spider-Man*--

--and the mother of *Spider-Girl.*

A number of costumed heroes have been kidnapped in recent days by a roving gang of armored warriors.

Her husband *Peter* is among the victims.

Her daughter *May* has gone in search of him.

For the past several hours, *Mary Jane* has tried to reach May's cell phone--

--but *Spider-Girl* seems to be out of any service area.

Cuddling her young son *Ben* even closer, Mary Jane prays for the safety of both husband and daughter.

Where are they?

What's happened to them?

Suddenly, she hears the creak of a window, feels a quick rush of damp air, and her heart hammers to the sound of footsteps...

I-is someone *there?*

Slowly, like a moth drawn to a seductive flame, she drifts toward her master bedroom...

PETER--is that really you?

Where have you been? *Why* haven't you called?

And what about *May?* Have you seen her?

I'm afraid I *haven't*...but I'm sure she'll be *okay.*

Everything's going to be just *fine,* Mary Jane.

I guarantee it.

I finally understand my true responsibility and know what must be done.

Peter--*your eyes!*

What's *wrong* with you--

--and *where* is our daughter?!

Her name is *May "Mayday" Parker.*

She is the daughter of *Spider-Man,* and suddenly wishes she'd learned to mind her own business.

YIKES!

While searching for the missing heroes, she and a few friends discovered a *dimensional gateway.*

Instead of leaving well enough alone, they entered it--

--only to encounter an angry army of *Asgardian battle-trolls!*

Yield, mortal!

You must *surrender* or *die.*

Are you *kidding?* There have got to be *other* choices.

How's about the one where I clobber *you?*

AVENGERS ASSEMBLE!

We need to close ranks and fall back before we're overwhelmed by sheer weight of numbers.

I think we already *lost* that option, Cap.

We're completely surrounded and the trolls have cut off every avenue of retreat.

There's gotta be a way out of here, Thunderstrike!

There's just GOTTA!

My mom's expecting me home for dinner.

Don't be such a big weenie, *J2!*

Try to *relax* and think of this as *fun*.

We get to travel to an exotic place like *Asgard--*

--and beat up a bunch of cool bad guys.

No offense, *Wild Thing--*

--but you need some serious therapy if *this* is your idea of a good time.

What's not to enjoy, Spider-Girl?

I get to go all ***medieval*** on the guys who snatched my dad.

We're going to play *slice* and *dice* until somebody produces *Wolverine.*

Wild Thing, *no!*

NO!

I won't let you torture a fallen foe.

Hey--!

We're supposed to be the good guys!

Have you completely *wigged out,* you self-righteous, wingheaded old fool?

I was just going to... ≈UFFFT≈

Behold! The mortals squabble amongst themselves like petulant children.

Their cause is surely LOST!

So be it!

DEFEAT-- t'was e'er their destiny!

--though he will not object to a few broken limbs.

Take heed, my brothers! Our master wants them alive--

Let the word issue forth-- *VICTORY is ours!*

J2-- RUN!

Try to save yourself-- =ARRRGG=

Silence, dog! We strike in the name of *LOKI, the god of evil!*

We have to take Thunderstrike's advice and--

--hit the highway!

Omigosh! *Captain America, Thunderstrike* and *Wild Thing*--everyone's down except us!

B-but we *can't* abandon the others!

Ain't like we got much choice, big guy.

That means only *one* thing--!

You're the son of the original *Juggernaut*, and you're virtually unstoppable, so *plow the road* and--

--GO!

GO! GO!

After them!

Find the sniveling cowards and bring them forth!

There is no escape from the dreaded *Isle of Silence!*

Though severely battered and barely conscious--

--*Captain America* can endure any pain--

--except for the despair caused by watching an *Avenger* desert his teammates.

This is *new...*

You hijackers made a big mistake when you entered my neighborhood.

I hate crime.

An uncanny *guardian angel* haunts the canyons of Manhattan.

It's my job to clean up these streets--

An angel with the body of a *demon* and the soul of a *hero.*

An angel called *Darkdevil.*

--and protect the innocent from scum like you.

Whoa! Getting a little rough there, fellow.

Not that I'm complaining. I'm usually the violent one.

You tend to be a lot more restrained.

Don't you dare compare yourself to me!

I'm a responsible *champion of justice.*

Darkdevil--!

You're just a lawless *vigilante.*

I must be missing the subtle *distinction.*

You're an undisciplined FREAK.

A monster who spits on the image of a great hero.

TWOKKKK!

W-what's gotten into you, Spider-Man?

I know we've never exactly been the best of friends, but you're acting crazy.

Wrong! I've never been saner.

I'm going to be more *proactive* against crime--

--and lawbreakers like YOU!

I sat on the sidelines for too long while this city became a cesspool.

No more! I'm through shirking my responsibilities.

He glides across the Manhattan sky silently, effortless, like a magnificent bird of prey.

He is called the *Vision,* and he is a synthezoid--

--composed of man-made and unknown materials that allow him to control his density and solidity.

...back as soon as I can confirm these sightings.

Like an intangible wraith he sinks into *Avengers Compound...*

Thank you, Jubilee and--*Oh!*

Vision!

I-I didn't hear you enter.

Indeed.

I have come as you requested, Stinger.

I appreciate the help.

I can only imagine how busy you are as a special advisor to President G. W. Bridge.

The President believes the recent rash of disappearances could represent a possible security threat to the nation.

I just got a report that some of the victims have been spotted and appear unharmed.

What is the status of your investigation?

According to *Jubliee*, both *Wolverine* and *Cyclops* are back, but now *Wild Thing* appears to be--did you want something, Jarvis?

I apologize for interrupting, Ms. Stinger--

--but you are needed in the conference room.

We have some unexpected arrivals that require your immediate attention.

Without another word, the Avengers' faithful major domo leads the way, and Stinger is soon shocked to find *Doc Magus*, *Hawkeye*, the *Scarlet Witch*, *Freebooter* and *American Dream*--all of whom were allegedly kidnapped!

Y-you're all SAFE!

Where were you? How did you get back?

That's the problem.

None of us remembers.

Freebooter, Hawk and I have already compared notes.

We were inside Hawkeye's dojo one minute and waking up in a subway tunnel the next.

You look much healthier than the last time I saw you, Wanda.

Awaking from a long coma has that effect.

Perhaps, but it doesn't explain the dark glow in your eyes.

Same goes for you, Freebooter.

How do you feel?

A little hungry.

I could use a good meal before getting back to work.

I've got a few ideas on how we can take a major bite out of crime.

Okay, but our first priority is finding some way to retrace your steps for the past forty-eight hours and--

Ms. Stinger, I'm sorry for intruding again, but another matter demands your urgent attention.

It appears that--

"--a major *confrontation* has erupted in Forest Hills, Queens!"

A pox on these craven mortals for eluding us!

Better to spend an eternity in search of them than admit failure to *Loki.*

Aye, 'tis true.

So who's this *Loki* guy that's got everyone shaking?

He's some kind of super-wizard who has always had a serious jones for the *Avengers.*

We barely escaped with our lives the last time we fought him--*and that was with the entire team!*

No offense, but you and me got no chance against him.

He's waaaaaaay out of our league, and that's even before you add the troll army.

If we had any brains, we'd scoot home and call in the cavalry.

...if.

Yeah...

I wonder what's keeping J2?

I know he was pretty freaked, but I can't believe he'd really ditch us.

He and Spider-Girl did the right thing.

They're our only hope.

I'm counting on them to make it back to Earth and mount a rescue force.

I admire you both for standing up for your friends--

--but Avengers don't desert other Avengers.

I guess that doesn't include me.

Your behavior could also stand some improvement, young lady.

I was doing just *fine* until you interfered.

I actually know what I'm doing, and I wouldn't have hurt that troll.

I just wanted to throw a scare into him so that he'd start talking.

We have seized another mortal, master.

You may cease your efforts in that regard.

Now that our stronghold has been discovered, we must abandon it lest my dear half-brother call upon us.

I have already returned our other guests to their unsuspecting world.

I trust they are making their presence felt--

--and one *more* can only serve to speed my noble cause.

The fates have cursed me since the day I accidentally caused a group of Earth's mightiest heroes to unite in common cause--

--and form the loathsome *Avengers.*

But mortals are a fragile lot.

Without kindness, integrity or compassion, they are heroes *no longer*--

--and can harry me NO MORE!

Now shall I journey to Earth and view the fruits of my efforts firsthand...

I--I'm not sure I can pop my claws without disemboweling myself...but I'm willing to give it a try.

Hold off a minute!

I think my chains are finally starting to loosen.

THUMPPP!

W-what's that?

THUMPPP!

Don't know, but I doubt it's good for us.

THUMPPP!

On the contrary...

...I may owe a couple of apologies.

KAPAK

TWAAAK

Sorry for the delay, guys.

We would have been here sooner, but traveling underground is *reallllly* confusing.

I was also trying to sense which caves were safe for us to enter.

You guys didn't happen to pick up any snacks on the way? I'm famished.

You coming, Cap? You can make sure we don't steal the silverware.

Funny how we never think to pack a lunch for these outings.

The burgers are on me when we get home.

I guess I deserve that comment.

I haven't given any of you a fair shot.

I misjudged you all, and I hope you'll find it in your hearts to forgive me.

Uhhhh...

...sure...

...no problem.

Whatever!

Now that we're all friends again, there's something you guys gotta see in the next cave...

It's the man called *Nova.*

Based on our past history, I'm actually tempted to leave him here.

Spider-Girl!

Only kidding.

Kind of.

This is obviously where *Loki* stored his victims--

--but *why?* And *where* are they now?

Loki is no fool. He must have realized that *Thor* would eventually stumble on this place.

Whatever goal he is hoping to achieve--

I recognize my dad's distinctive scent along with a few others.

I estimate they've been gone for a few hours.

"--it must already be in motion!"

Ahhh, I hear the sounds of a skirmish building in the distance.

The tension rises as tempers flare.

Soon a war will erupt between my unwitting allies and their naive brethren.

Hero will battle hero--

--until not a single one remains ***standing!***

'RING!
© KESEL '05

Loki, the Norse god of mischief, has recently masterminded the abduction of numerous costumed heroes.

Haunted by the knowledge that he accidentally caused the formation of the *Avengers* many years ago, he plans to atone for his carelessness--

--by ending the modern AGE OF HEROES.

After magically stripping his victims of all their honor and mercy, he returns them to an unsuspecting Earth--

--where they soon clash with their former allies.

I need everyone to CALM DOWN!

There's no reason to fight.

We're all on the same side here.

Not even close, *Stinger*.

Darkdevil is a lawless vigilante who belongs behind bars--

--and the *Hulk* is even worse.

That's tellin'er, bub.

Who instigated this brawl?

Spider-Man attacked me for no reason.

We've never exactly been buds, but something's *different* about him.

It's like he's suddenly grimmer and grittier!

Aye, my magicks have sown their dark seeds--

--fouling hearts once noble and pure.

We're drawing a crowd, people.

Let's move to ***Avengers Compound*** where we can resolve our differences in private.

Why *your* head-quarters?

Mainly 'cause you don't *have* one--

--unless there's a secret ***web cave*** I don't know about.

Bah! I've had enough of this nonsense.

I don't need the rest of you clowns or your smart remarks.

I'm still the strongest thing walking the Earth, and you'd better not forget it.

There's something very *wrong* here--

"--and I know just the *guy* to puzzle it out!"

The Hulk is not as brainless as others perceive.

I can divine the one he seeks and must thwart his purpose.

Why are we allowing the ***Hulk*** to run free?

He's as dangerous as any menace I've ever battled.

We should draw up a list of potential threats--

--and systematically take them *out* before they can cause more trouble.

Good idea! We need to be more proactive.

We'll clobber 'em all!

You can count on the ***X-People.***

Oh, man! T-they're talking about a *blacklist.*

I wish ***Thunderstrike*** and the others were here. Where are they--?

Far beyond the realm of mortal space, on the legendary *Isle of Silence*...

The stench of humanity grows e'er stronger.

The fugitives must be nigh.

Nearer than you *think*, handsome.

This is no time for jokes, *Spider-Girl*.

We need to flatten these creatures and return to *Earth*.

The entire planet may be in danger.

I love the way you trolls speak.

Although it reminds me that I have to finish a paper on *Shakespeare* when I get home.

Way to pile on the *pressure*, *Nova!*

Bad enough that we're stuck in some mythological dimension--

--fighting an army of trolls who are working for an Asgardian psycho.

I'm more worried about my dad and the other kidnapped heroes, *J2*.

If *Loki* and his bully boys have harmed *Wolverine*--!

Think positive, *Wild Thing!* We'll learn what happened to Loki's captives and find a way to rescue them.

Now, if you'll excuse me for a moment, I need to regain my shield. I feel kind of lost without it.

Mortal swine!

In your greedy haste, you are undone!

KWHUMPPPP!

=UGNN=

My reflexes keep growing slower.

They just can't do the job, anymore.

I sensed him behind me, but still couldn't react in time.

Stay down, Cap! I'll take care of your big buddy.

B-be my guest, *Thunderstrike.*

Easy does it, Cap. You took one heck of a hit.

You need a hand getting up?

I appreciate the offer, Spider-Girl...

Don't be that way, Cap! If anyone's earned a rest, it's you.

We can handle any trouble that comes our way.

I'm not used to sitting on the sidelines.

I'm not suggesting anything permanent.

Just go slow until you feel better.

...but it'll be time to hang up my shield when I can no longer stand on my own. I've taken worse punishment in my day.

Yeah, but you were a lot younger and--*Ohmigosh!* I...I didn't mean that the way it *sounded.*

It's okay, Spider-Girl. I didn't take offense. There's no disgrace in growing old--

--especially in our profession and =ARRGH=

My ribs-- I think they're broken.

I hope we don't run into more trolls. I may be even more useless.

Hey, guys-- LOOK!

I think I found a way *off* this island! But that still leaves the problem of getting back to *Earth.*

I know where we can get some help in that regard--

--ASGARD, home of the legendary Norse Gods!

Whether you people admit it or not, something happened to each one of you while you were missing...

Your eyes have all grown darker, and you seem a little angrier and more aggressive...

That's only your opinion, Stinger.

I just think the rest of you are soft on crime.

Okay, *Doc Magus*, let's just say that's true for the sake of discussion...

However, none of you even remember being kidnapped. At the very least we need to fill in these memory gaps.

All right, all right. I recall being in my *sanctum sanctorum*.

I had heard about the abductions and was following up some leads when I was suddenly interrupted by--*of course!*

It must be *him*. He's the only one powerful enough to enthrall me.

The man who kidnapped me is--

Dr. Stephen Strange, the former Sorcerer Supreme of this plane of reality, is bathed in mystical energies--

--as he seeks to unravel the mystery of the missing heroes.

But the hunter has become the hunted!

Hail, my good doctor. Wouldst thou grant welcome to an old friend?

LOKI--!

I should have guessed that you were behind the abductions!

Only a sorcerer of your inestimable stature could have conducted such a campaign without detection.

Do you seek to flatter my ability to mask my magicks--

--or merely to excuse your failure to perceive them?

Your fall from grace is well-known to me, old man.

Your power has ebbed with the passing years--

--else I could not have breached your protective wards with so little effort.

Though the deathless *Vishanti* have abandoned me, I can still call upon the power of the *Ancient One*--

--to bind you within the unbreakable chains of *Chamagoram.*

Foolish mortal! Chamagoram was still a babe in arms while I was already mastering the arts of Asgardian magic.

See how easily I shatter your spell and reduce it to nothingness.

If my power is so insignificant when compared to yours, *why* have you sought me out?

What is it you *fear?*

'Tis *detection* that concerns me.

Fear is much too strong a word, Doctor...

The serpents I have planted need *time* to spread their venom--

--and you could reveal my hand *too soon!*

=UGGGN=

Even as Dr. Strange hits the ground, his Greenwich Village retreat is rocked by the sudden appearance of a lumbering behemoth.

YOU!

Even in your astral form, I recognize you. Your name is *Loki*, and you're somehow related to that hammer-swinging, yellow-haired yahoo.

I assume you mean my noble half-brother, *Thor, the god of thunder.*

Yeah. Whatever.

I'm more interested in what you've done to *Strange.*

The guy may be a pain in the butt, but he's *my* pain.

You'd better *pray* he's still breathing.

He is...

But *gods* do not pray.

Fate has delivered you into my hands, Hulk...

Since you were instrumental in the forming of the *Avengers*--

--'tis meet that you aid in their *destruction.*

You guys sure this is Strange's place--?

We need to take him down *quickly*--

--before he can cast a *spell* on us.

Hey, whatever happened to *innocent* until proven *guilty*?

BAR-RooOM!

I warned you to stay OUT of my way--!

Uhhh...

I'm suddenly thinking that Strange may *not* be our most pressing concern.

TWAAAAM!

You should have listened to me.

I'm sick and tired of being hunted like a wild animal.

It's finally time for the Hulk to STRIKE BACK!

Spider-Man was right! You are a *menace.*

We're going to put you down like a rabid dog.

You're welcome to *try,* Freebooter--!

But you're not *man* enough to challenge me.

No one can stop the HULK!

Stand down, Hulk!

I'm sure this is a big misunderstanding.

We need to talk things out before anyone gets hurt.

Listen to me, you tin-plated rust bucket--!

I'm through taking orders from you--

Oh, *yeah--?!*

RIPPPPPPP!

--and EVERYONE else!

With the Hulk in his current state, we need to clear the area of civilians before casualties start mounting.

SWAKKKKK!

Forget 'em, Stinger! Leave the crowd control to New York's Finest.

Our job is to stop ol' greenskin by any means necessary.

Wolverine's got a point.

If the *lookie-loos* don't have enough sense to run for the hills, they aren't doing the *gene pool* any favors.

Do you think the Hulk attacked Dr. Strange?

While he has no obvious physical wounds, he appears to be in some kind of coma.

What's wrong with ***Doc Magus?*** His magic should be able to detect the ***binding spell*** that prevents me from communicating or moving--

--unless he, too, is under Loki's spell!

Maybe he's just in shock.

THE CASTLE SUPREME OF ASGARD

YOWSA!

This is un-*freaking*-believable!

I...I remember reading about ***Asgard*** when we studied mythology, but I...

I never knew it was *real*.

W-why is everyone staring at us?

They don't see many mortals around here.

Just keep walking toward the big castle.

We have friends in high places.

--and convinced me that I shouldn't waste my time trying to teach you losers how to be real heroes.

Oh, dear! How will we ever survive without you as a role model?

I...I hate to hold you back, but I...

I need to *rest*.

You should go on without me.

I...I'll catch up later.

You got it, old man. When you fall behind, you stay behind.

What's with the attitude, ***Nova?*** You used to be annoying when you acted like a super-***Boy Scout.***

Now you're just a ***total jerk.***

Heyyyyyy...

Whatever!

We're not leaving you behind, Cap.

We'll get you to whatever passes for a doctor in these parts.

Did Loki do something to you?

Yeah, he opened my eyes--

Suddenly, the streets echo with a crack of thunder and a rush of wind as an armored figure hurtles from the heavens...

Thunderstrike, son of my great friend, and ***Captain America,*** my most valiant comrade-in-arms-- ***'tis GOOD to see you both!***

To what do I owe this unprecedented pleasure? Why do you grace my humble kingdom with your noble presence?

Perhaps I can be of service.

I bid you all welcome to the realm eternal of THOR, lord of Asgard.

Oh, man! *Dramatic entrances 'r' you.*

How'd you even know we were in town?

My heralds alerted me ere thy dragon ship touched our sacred shore.

I hate to play the spoiler, but we're here on ***Avengers*** business.

It seems ***Loki*** is up to his old tricks again...

You may be super-tough--

--but even mountains wear down over time.

You're pretty fast, kid--

--but *strength* always beats *speed.*

WRAKKK!

=AAYIIII=

Are you insane? Bluestreak's only a teenager.

I remember your father.

He had a big mouth, too.

THWAMM!

You could have killed her.

Hulk doesn't know you.

I'm *Argo,* the son of *Hercules.*

KRASHH!

He liked to *talk*--

--but the Hulk just *fights.*

You are acting like a petulant child, Hulk, and I am sick of it.

The Scarlet Witch--!

Cease your tantrum at once or suffer the full fury of my *hex power.*

I don't know how you made the ground swallow me. I don't care.

THWUMPPP!

I'm strong enough to bust out of *any* trap.

ARRRGH!

So powerful is the Hulk's blow that the ground erupts, showering the Scarlet Witch with massive chunks of debris.

Playtime's over, bub.

It's you and me now.

Even *you* talk too much.

You *heal* fast, but I *hurt* faster.

Your skull's pretty thick--

KWUMP!

KWUMP!

KWUMP!

Only one of us is comin' out alive.

My money's on *me.*

--but I can keep pounding on it until your brain turns to *jelly.*

PWOOM! PWOOM! PWOOM!

Leave him alone, you maniac!

Nice work with the gas grenades, Goblin! Even the Hulk needs to breathe.

Should I pull *Wolverine* to safety?

Nah! The world's better off without him.

THWOKKK!

He isn't much better than the Hulk as far as I'm concerned.

You seem to have grown a real *vicious* streak, Spidey.

I LIKE IT!

PETER--!

Oh, God!

LIVE

POLICE

With growing horror, *Mary Jane Parker* watches as the *Hulk* wrenches off her husband's artificial leg--

--and hammers him mercilessly.

Even if he survives, she knows that *Peter Parker* will never again be the hero he once was...

Even *if*...

HEAVVVY!

I'll say one thing for Thor, he lives big.

S'funny--I read about him as a kid and always assumed he was just a regular super-guy who pretended to be a god.

Sort of like you faking the *hero-thing?*

Very funny.

You guys know how Cap's doing?

"I think he's still getting checked out by some guy called the *Vizier.*"

Little do I know of mortals--

--but I fear thy warrior days are behind thee.

No longer can thy noble heart risk the strain of combat.

I understand and I sincerely do appreciate the advice.

But I have a mission to complete.

I can't stop now.

Not while the world still needs *Captain America.*

All right, Hulk! If brute force is all you understand, I'll hit you with my *maximum intensity.*

Cyclops, if you really think your crummy *eye-beams* can stop me--

--you need to get your head *examined.*

AAAAAAGH!

This madness has gone on long enough, Hulk.

--and slowly solidify them until the pain forces you to surrender.

But as your body gets *harder--*

I can take all the *pain* you can dish out, Vision.

--it also becomes easier to SHATTER!

I have squandered precious moments trying to understand why you have chosen to attack us.

No more! It is a simple matter for me to alter my density so that I can slip my immaterial arms into your body--

SKKRAKKK!

UHHHHHH!

THWOKK!

Somebody's gotta teach ya some manners, Hulkie, and it might as well be me.

It's gonna cost a small fortune ta replace the Vision's arms.

Hey! When I belt a guy, I expect him ta hit the ground.

Why ya still *standin'?* Ya tryin' ta give me a complex or sumthin'?

THWIPPP!

KRAAAAK!

You annoy me, little man. You always thought you were as ***strong*** as the Hulk.

You never WERE, in your prime.

And you're certainly not *now--*

--when you're part MACHINE!

AAAAAGH!

We're throwing everything we have at the Hulk.

Nothing's working.

God help me, but he must be stopped--

--even if it means KILLING him!

T-things look pretty grim on the home front.

The Hulk's gonna pay for what he did to my dad.

Yeah, I'm sure he's real worried about facing you.

Whate'er madness doth possess the Hulk, the hammer of *Thor* shall soon end his monstrous rampage.

I shall strike for ASGARD and HONOR.

Uhhhh...

Yeah.

Us, too.

Captain America remains silent, his face grim and eyes narrowed, for he knows that this battle may well mark the *last stand* for many of Earth's mightiest heroes...

SO SWEARS THE SON OF ODIN!

TG
KESEL
'05

Determined to destroy the *Avengers* and end the modern *Age of Heroes*--

--*Loki*, the Norse god of mischief, has magically darkened the souls of various costumed heroes--

--and has sent the incredible *Hulk* on a murderous rampage.

FLAME ON!

You were never *GQ* material to begin with--

--but those robotic ***stumps*** sticking out of your chest are the grossest fashion statements I've ever seen.

What's gotten into you, *Hulk?*

Why are you suddenly acting up ***now,*** after keeping such a low profile for so many years?

Everyone needs a hobby, *Torch.*

I just happen to like ***trashing*** cities--

SSSSSSSSS

--and SPLATTERING annoying hotheads!

That trick might have worked in the past--

--but I can evaporate this water stream with a concentrated heat blast.

Oh, yeah?!

Let's see if you can also melt this special delivery I'm sending to you with the speed of a guided missile!

WHUKKK!

=ugnnn=

I've got you, Johnny! Just flame off and try to relax while I scoop you up.

Why did you attack him alone? You should have waited for the rest of the *Fantastic Five* to arrive.

H-he caught me by surprise, Lyja.

I...I'll be *fine* as soon as I catch my breath.

Take all the time you need, because this is the *last battle* you and your shape-shifting wife will ever--

ARRRGH!

You shouldn't threaten the *Human Torch* and *Ms. Fantastic*, Hulk.

We *F5ers* protect our own.

M-my head-- feels like my brain's about to explode!

Y-you're the Richards kid--*the one they call Psi-Lord!*

Give up, Hulk!

Please don't force me to reduce your mind to guacamole.

I doubt even that would stop him, Franklin.

However, I believe this device **will.**

Do you recognize it, **Doctor Banner?**

You helped design it to siphon away the gamma radiation and return you to your human form.

I...I am the ***Hulk. The HULK!*** The strongest one of all! I hate that weakling.

I...I won't let you change me back to him.

Don't call me "Banner"!

Not ***now!***

Not EVER!

Well *said,* my unwitting pawn.

You cannot fall...not quite *yet.*

My victims must first taste ***fatal blood*** to seal my darkling spells and bind them *fore'ermore.*

Reinvigorated by Loki's magic, the Hulk strikes the ground with one smashing blow that encompasses all his *rage*...all his *frustration*...and all his relentless *power!*

KWA—

THOOOM!

So ruthless, so irresistible is the force of the shockwave that it instantly shatters the *Big Brain robot* into a thousand shards--

--and buries young *Franklin Richards* beneath a veritable mountain of debris.

We can't hold back any longer, *Stinger.* Too many of us have already fallen.

We need to blow this monster away, even if it means *killing him.*

We're *Avengers*--not *executioners!*

I can't sanction murder, *American Dream.*

There must be a way to stop the *Hulk.* We've done it in the past.

How could he have possibly grown powerful enough to beat us all?

'Tis sorcery most foul!

The castle of *Thor* in *Asgard*, home of the legendary *Norse Gods*...

Though the *Hulk* doth possess power beyond measure, e'en he could not prevail against the forces assembled against him.

Although he knows it not, methinks Loki's power has been merged with his--

--but for *what* treacherous purpose?

It doesn't really matter, Thor.

Whatever the *god of evil* hopes to gain, we'll find a way to stop him.

Aye, we *shall*...

...but I must first ask a most precious *boon* of thee, old friend.

Sure, what can I do for you?

The Vizier has told me of thy recent injuries and the waning strength of thy noble heart.

For the sake of thy mortal health, I must ask thee to *stand aside* in the coming battle.

I have never once shirked my responsibility since the day I first became *Captain America*.

I have always done my duty to the best of my ability--

--but I also realize that I can no longer function at *one hundred percent*.

That's why I have decided that this will be my *last mission*.

I intend to surrender my shield and retire as soon as it's over.

Since I don't want to accidentally endanger the rest of the team, I'll do my best--

--to keep out of everyone's way.

Elsewhere in the castle...

What's keeping Cap and Thor?

I'm anxious to get back to Earth and take a shot at the Hulk.

You children just don't understand. This is no game.

We need to be ***stronger, tougher*** and--

--and the Hulk will pay for his crimes with his ***life.***

You *can't* be serious, Nova. There's got to be *another* way.

There was a time when I might have agreed with you, Spider-Girl.

No more!

The only way to stop the criminals and the monsters is--

--to ***DESTROY*** them!

?!?

We have to ***overwhelm*** and ***crush*** them--*responding to their violent acts with even* ***greater*** *violence!*

Innocent lives are being threatened--

AAAYY-YIII!

KZAKKK!

Ohmigosh! The Vizier must be under Loki's control!

He attacked Nova for no reason.

Hold on, Thunderstrike! I think Nova's trying to speak--!

D-don't hurt him--!

Be at ease, my friends.

I struck for the good of all.

And you expect us to *believe* you?

H-he's telling the *truth.*

M-my head's been in a *fog* ever since I was grabbed by Loki's Trolls--

--and my thoughts have been *dark* and *twisted.*

L-Loki must have done something to me while I was his prisoner.

The Vizier dispelled the clouds.

I'm finally thinking *clearly,* again--

'Tis as I feared.

Loki is employing darkling magic to bring out the *basest instincts* of his victims.

How do we stop him?

--and you can *forget* everything I said about killing the Hulk.

While the legions of Asgard gather to punish his Troll servants, we must hie to *Midgard*--

--and destroy the source of his magic before *fatal blood* can be spilled.

Else thy brethren be fore'er CURSED with souls as black as pitch!

Meanwhile, back on *Earth*...

It looks like I'm not the only one who's tired of watching you *equivocate*, Stinger.

W-what are you saying, Dream?

The decision to ***terminate*** the Hulk has been made without your approval--

--by ***Wolverine*** and the ***Thing!***

It's time ta put the final kibosh on that green-skinned creep.

GO, Wolvie! GO! GO!

He's as good as ***dead.***

No! NO! I won't be a party to cold-blooded murder.

It's our job to find a better solution.

We can never allow ourselves to become as *bad* as the monsters we fight.

A well-placed amplified ***sonic blast*** should knock you off course.

Get ***away*** from me, you crazy little--

SSSPWOOOM!

Watch your mouth, runt!

That's no way to talk to a lady.

I hope you don't expect me to thank you, Stinger. I didn't *need* your help, and I certainly didn't *want* it.

SLAMMMM!

I'm the *Hulk*, and I can defeat anything that lives.

=Agggn!=

The rest of you are on the verge of exhaustion, and you're getting weaker by the moment. I never get weak. I just keep growing ***stronger*** and ***stronger*** until--

Be SILENT, thou boisterous buffoon!

In other words...

Shut up!

Surrender, *Hulk,* or face the wrath of--

--*THOR, god of thunder!*

So what are the ***rest*** of us-- *chopped liver?!*

Our job is to play backup and find *Loki.*

Aye, while I seek out *Dr. Strange,* whose mastery of magic will surely serve our cause.

Heed me, Hulk! Though I believe thou art naught but a helpless plaything of the gods, still must I end this senseless rampage.

No longer can I suffer thy blind need to lash out and destroy.

Cease this madness AT ONCE! Do not force me to HUMBLE thee!

You always did like the sound of your own voice, Blondie.

Tell me when you finish pontificating--

--so that I can shove that stupid *hammer* down your big fat throat!

KA-TWANG!

Where words have failed, the power of *Thor* must now prevail. I strike for *Earth*--

--and every AVENGER e'er assembled!

Yikes!

How's about a little *warning* the next time you swing that overgrown mallet?

It took all my spiderlike speed and agility to avoid getting clobbered by that flying debris and--*HEYYY!*

Something's *wrong* here.

My *spider-sense* is tingling like crazy.

It's warning me of some kind of *danger*--

--b-but there's *nothing's* there!

Meanwhile, not far away, in the Sanctum Sanctorum of *Dr. Strange*...

What evil hath befallen the former *sorcerer supreme?*

LOKI!

I know he's hated the *Avengers* ever since he accidentally brought the team together--

--but we'll find a way to stop him *and* the Hulk.

We *will*... because *we MUST!*

Can't really say...not that it's any of *your* business.

I'm *Doc Magus,* the current magic maven.

Who are you?

I am the *Grand Vizier of Asgard Eternal,* and thou art a *fool,* a *pretender* or *bewitched*--

--else thou wouldst surely perceive the *mystic bonds* that hold Strange helpless.

What are you--*by the sacred Vishanti!*

W-why didn't I see them earlier?

'Twas the work of--

I may not be able to see any danger, but that doesn't mean it *isn't* there.

I know I'd want a ringside seat if I was behind this madness--

--and Loki *is* a magical guy.

Something tells me I should just follow my gut and--

--take a SHOT!

THWOKKK!

I--I hit *something*... but *what*?!

At that exact moment...

"--Loki to stand REVEALED!"

Swell.

Great.

Wonderful.

The mystic trail leads here.

Aye, and now shall Dr. Strange and I combine our magicks with thee to force--

Sometimes I'm way too *clever* for my own good.

Avengers Assemble!

Spider-Girl needs help.

We're already moving, Cap.

Just stay out of our way, old man.

You're going *down*, Loki.

Foolish, *foolish* mortals...

SPWOOM!

Does the raging *hurricane* tremble before the vengeance of the *rose petals?*

--and VICTORY will soon be MINE!

Nay...I say thee NAY!

I wield the POWER ETERNAL of Asgard--

That's *never* going to happen, mister!

Not while *Captain America* is still standing!

Art thou *mad,* mortal?

You are the weakest *Avenger* of all--*unworthy of me even in your prime!*

I may not possess as much raw *power* as the others, but I still have the *fighting spirit* of the country I'm proud to defend.

Though thy raw strength is nearly the equal of my own, Hulk--

--the power of my *enchanted hammer* knows neither peer nor mortal measure.

You may be a *god,* Loki--

--but this *man* will somehow find a way to beat you.

Go ahead and use your dumb hammer! It can't stop the *Hulk.*

Nothing CAN!

KWAKKK!

Bah! We both know you're a big *nothing* without that crummy club--

--and I'm gonna break it over your pointy little head.

Do you *hear* me, mister?

I won't *stop*--

--*I won't QUIT*--

--*until I find a WAY!*

So be it! I shall unleash the full and unfettered fury of mighty *Mjolnir* upon thee.

It seems like I've spent most of my life fighting bullies and tyrants like you.

You may give yourself different names and titles, but you're all the same.

This be thy *final* warning...

YIELD or DIE!

Do your ***worst,*** goldilocks!

I ain't afraid of you. Even if you *can* hurt me, I'll only get ***angrier*** and ***stronger.***

That dark crystal--it's the one the ***Vizier*** described!

In your arrogance, you've left it ***exposed*** and ***unprotected.***

Cowards who hide from the *truth*--

--and ***run*** from the sight of *free men* and *women.*

You're destined to ***fail,*** Loki. Your kind always ***does.***

Looks like you've ***underestimated*** us mere mortals once again!

No! NO! NO!

SPASHH!

ARRRRRRGGH!

W-what the--?!

Thor, *w-wait--!*

THWAKA-BWOOM!

=UGGGGG=

Idiot! Insect! You are like the ant who believes he can conquer the Storm Giant.

You have dared much, you enfeebled old fool...and *you* HAVE FAILED!

SHAZZZZZZZAK!

Thor himself guaranteed my victory when he ***slew*** the Hulk.

Your final act of heroism was all for ***naught,*** and you must carry that knowledge to your mortal ***grave!***

EEEYARRG!

LIAR!

Thy spell was already broken, and I averted my aim at the last moment.

The Hulk *lives!*

I may have misspoke.

A pity I can no longer apologize to the good Captain.

Still dost thou taunt me? Thou hast sealed thy fate by taking a mortal life.

Aye, but do not expect me to cower or beg forgiveness.

Long have I known the price of failure.

Even as *Loki* smirks, the *Hulk* begins to stir--

--and his eyes soon glaze with ever-mounting *horror.*

W-what have I done?

Calling upon the ancient power of *Asgard,* the thunder god confronts his unrepentant half-brother...

Even as a blast of unearthly energy hurls from Thor's enchanted hammer, the Hulk suddenly springs forward...

LOKI!

For crimes both monstrous and heinous, thou hast condemned thyself to *Limbo everlasting.*

You! You *used* me, and now you gotta *pay--!*

A-Are you *mad--?!*

Yeah!

Thanks to you, I'm *ruined* on Earth--

--so I'm gonna return the favor for the rest of *eternity!*

How's Cap?

We'll have a better idea as soon as the paramedics get here.

T-they won't arrive... in time.

Please don't be sad.

W-we won.

We did our duty...and beat the monsters today.

"I-it was a privilege to serve with you all...

"...and I have every confidence...

"...that you will always rise to meet every new challenge...

"...because tomorrow will always bring new monsterssss..."

STAND ASIDE!

I must reach Captain America's side before the final spark of life doth fade.

I have arrived in time.

His soul has not yet fled his mortal form.

Get ye back! Give me space.

For I must now call forth the godly *life force* which flows within all Asgardians and grants us our very *immortality.*

I shall combine it with the *spirit* and *power* of the very land beloved by *Captain America--*

--and I shall channel all this *energy* through my enchanted hammer.

M-my lord, wouldst thou grant such a sacred gift to a mere mortal--?

For centuries beyond ken, I have known the company of countless valiant *warriors-born--*

--and never have I met one with more *nobility, honor* or *courage* than this *mere* mortal.

If any individual truly deserves the *Tribute Supreme,* his name is *Captain America.*

For the next few moments, the *Lord of Asgard* utters a sacred enchantment that predates the age of man--

--and then he unites his very essence with the irresistible power flowing through his magic hammer until--

Slowly, majestically, the glowing and transformed figure of *Captain America* begins to streak upward...

Rising higher and higher into the sky, it blazes like a living beacon of *hope*--

--*freedom*--

--*justice*--

--and *COURAGE!*

I am the *Watcher.*

For uncounted eons, I have observed the birth of worlds, the rise of civilizations and the deaths of galaxies.

In one possible future of the world called *Earth,* the *age of heroes* has survived a most pivotal moment--

--and a new *star* is born in celebration.

From now until the end of time, it will shine among the heavens--

"--and serve to inspire countless new generations of HEROES!"

THE END!

Pencils by Pat Olliffe

Issue #1, page 4

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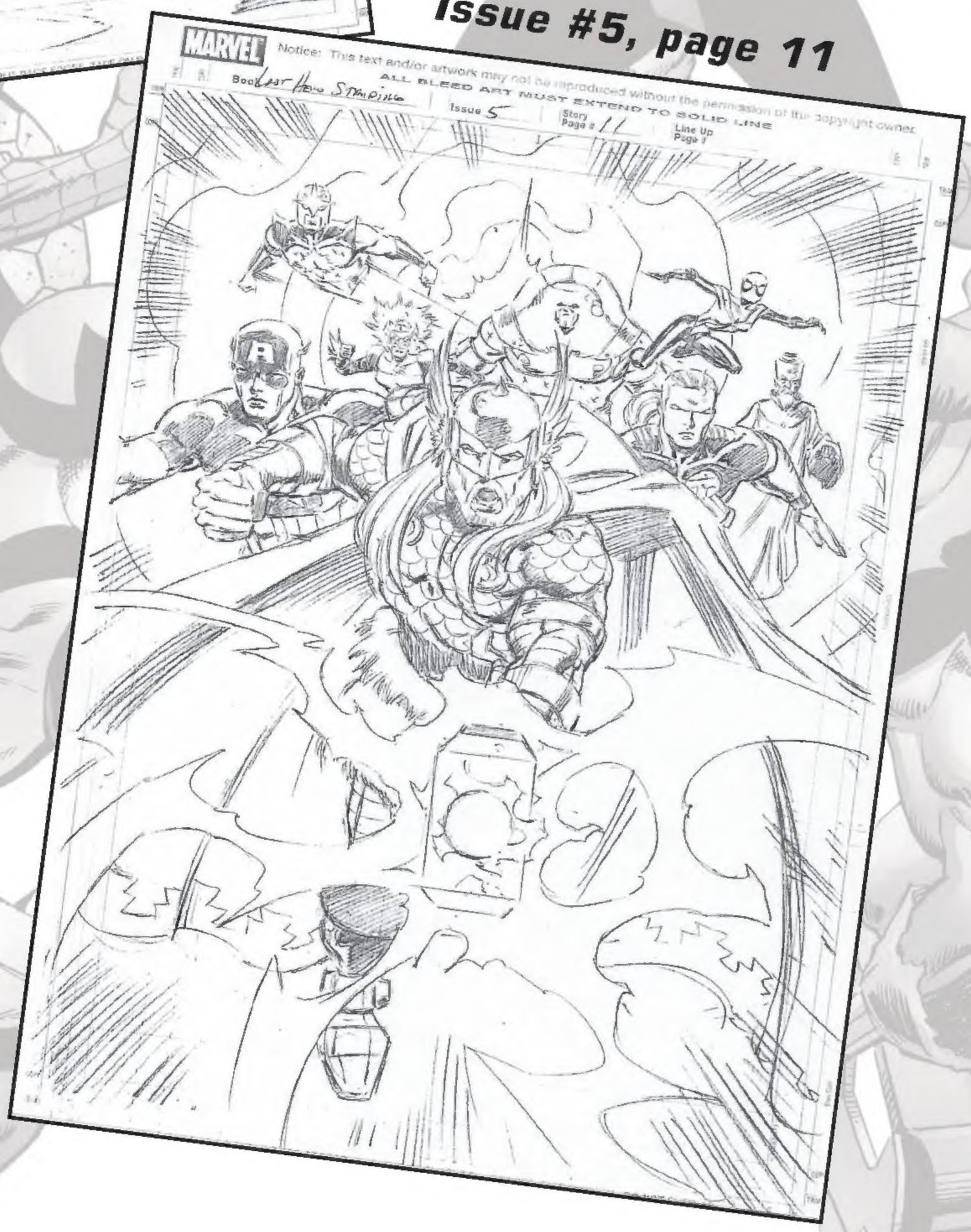
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Book Last Hero Standing
Issue 5
Story Page # 11
Line Up Page #

THE GREAT HEROES OF THE MARVEL UNIVERSE ARE VANISHING WITHOUT A TRACE!

What has happened to Spider-Man, the Thing, the Scarlet Witch, Captain America and the rest of the MU's heavy hitters?

Spider-Girl, the Fantastic Five and A-Next must join forces with today's superstars to uncover the answer – and the trail leads to a major Avengers villain! Does the presence of the Watcher signify the end of this age of heroes?

Collecting *Last Hero Standing #1-5*, by the *Spider-Girl* team of writer Tom DeFalco and artist Pat Olliffe.

MARVEL